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BOOK REVIEWS

Bouvier's Law Dictionary. By Francis Rawle. Philadelphia. Eighth Edition. Published by Vernon Law Book Company, Kansas City, Mo., and West Publishing Company, St. Paul, Minn. Volumes Three. pp. XIX and 3504.

When John Bouvier wrote the first edition of his dictionary in 1839, he stated in his preface that his purpose in undertaking its preparation was to be useful to his profession. Few men have more completely accomplished a purpose. The evidence of this is found in the fact that, after a lapse of seventy-five years, his dictionary still holds its own as the first work of its kind in this country and still ranks as a leading American legal classic along with Greenleaf on Evidence, Justice Story's Commentaries and the celebrated Commentaries of Chancellor Kent. Further evidence of the merit of the work and its usefulness is found in the fact that the demands of the profession has made necessary this, the eighth edition.

John Bouvier was a Frenchman by birth. He came to this country at the age of fifteen and settled in Philadelphia. Owing to reverses suffered by his father soon afterward, he was compelled to shift for himself and at the age of twenty-five we find him becoming a citizen of the United States and the proprietor of a printing office in West Philadelphia. While busily engaged as an editor and publisher, he made up his mind to study law. Beginning when he was scarcely under thirty, he found many obstacles confronting him. The carefully prepared courses of study in law schools under trained teachers, such as exist to-day, were of course unknown. He read for the most part Coke and Blackstone and such other scant legal literature as could be had. He was often handicapped because there was for the American lawyer nothing which would help him out in reading the language of the law as an English dictionary assists one in reading and understanding the English language. The difficulties he encountered had not appreciably diminished when he was admitted to the bar in 1822. It was on this account that he made up his mind to try to help those who came after him by preparing an adequate law dictionary. Hence, while serving

as recorder of the City of Philadelphia and later as judge of the Criminal Sessions, he worked upon this task and in 1839 brought out his first edition, which consisted of two volumes.

This work was received with the approval of eminent judges and lawyers, including Justice Story and Chancellor Kent, the latter saying of it, "After running over almost every title, I am deeply impressed with the evidence of industry, skill and judgment with which the work was compiled." It was recognized as a distinctly American work. It embodied a large mass of material relating to the operations of our government, our constitutions and our political and civil institutions, as well as technical expressions peculiar in their meaning to American law, such as the rights of descent and distribution, the mode of acquiring and transferring property, and the criminal law and its administration. The author himself prepared the first three editions, while the fourth was prepared in 1852 from his manuscripts after his death. The fifth edition was prepared by an editorial staff of distinguished lawyers and made its appearance in 1867, the general plan of Bouvier being adhered to strictly. The editions of 1883, 1897, and the present edition were edited by Francis Rawle, of the Philadelphia bar. Because of the notable enlargement of the work, particularly on its encyclopedic side, these editions are known as "Rawle's Revisions." The present edition, besides containing a large number of new titles, represents a further enlargement on its encyclopedic side. For this reason, it becomes of greater value to the student and lawyer because, besides enlightening him as to the meaning of technical expressions, it will often give him the bit of law he seeks with its corresponding authority. Many of the titles, relating to branches of the law which have undergone distinct developments recently, have been practically rewritten. Citations of authorities have been increased and it has been made to approximate much more closely what it purports to be, namely, "A Concise Encyclopedia of the Law." As a practical implement and time saver for the law student and the busy lawyer it leaves little to be desired and is easily the first American work of its kind.

H. W. A.